

Message Text

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 01 SAPPOR 00050 160359Z

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 FEA-01 ERDA-07 AID-05 CEA-01
CIAE-00 COME-00 EPG-02 DODE-00 EB-07 FPC-01 H-02
INR-07 INT-05 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-04
USIA-15 OES-07 SP-02 SS-15 STR-04 TRSE-00 ACDA-10
SIL-01 LAB-04 /119 W

-----160410Z 013523 /16

R 160348Z MAY 77

FM AMCONSUL SAPPORO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 445

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

UNCLAS SAPPORO 0050

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG, ECON, JA

SUBJECT: HOKKAIDO COAL MINE DISASTER

1. SUMMARY: METHANE GAS EXPLOSION IN MITSUI COAL COMPANY'S
ASHIBETSU MINE IN HOKKAIDO ON MAY 11 KILLED 25 MINERS AND FORCED
AT LEAST 3 WEEK SUSPENSION OF MINING OPERATIONS AT JAPAN'S THIRD
LARGEST COAL MINE. END SUMMARY

2. METHANE GAS EXPLOSION KILLED 25 MINERS AND INJURED 8 OTHERS MAY 11

AT MITSUI COAL COMPANY'S ASHIBETSU MINE IN HOKKAIDO. EXPLOSION
OCCURED AT DEPTH OF 600 METERS IN MINE'S NUMBER TWO SHAFT. CAUSE OF
EXPLOSION IS STILL UNDER INVESTIGATION. THERE IS SPECULATION,
HOWEVER, THAT ALARM DEVICE DESIGNED TO DETECT DANGEROUS CONCENTRATIONS

OF GAS FAILED. EXPLOSION WAS POSSIBLY TRIGGERED BY CARELESS
BLASTING OPERATIONS ELSEWHERE IN MINE.

3. ALTHOUGH EXPOSION DID NOT CAUSE EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO MINE, IT IS
EXPECTED TO RESULT IN AT LAST 3 WEEK SUSPENSION OF MINING OPERA-
TIONS. WITH ANNUAL OUTPUT OF ABOUT 1.3 MILLION TONS, ASHIBETSU
UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 SAPPOR 00050 160359Z

MINE IS JAPAN'S THIRD LARGEST (AND HOKKAIDO'S SECOND LARGEST) COAL
MINE. INITIAL ANTICIPATED LOSS TO MITSUI COAL COMPANY FROM
SUSPENSION OF OPERATIONS AND COMPENSATION OF BEREAVED FAMILIES IS
EXPECTED TO APPROACH 3 MILLION DOLLARS.

4. ASHIBETSU DISASTER IS FIRST MAJOR MINE ACCIDENT IN HOKKAIDO
SINCE 1975, BUT DRAMATIZES DETERIORATING CONDITION OF MOST OF

ISLAND'S 20 COAL MINES. GAS POSES INCREASING SAFETY HAZARD IN THESE MINES, PARTLY AS CONSEQUENCE OF EXTREME DEPTHS AT WHICH MINING OPERATIONS MUST BE CARRIED OUT.

5. COMMENT: ACCIDENT IS LIKELY TO RESULT IN INCREASED PUBLIC, UNION AND GOVERNMENT PRESSURE ON MINE OPERATORS TO IMPROVE MINE SAFETY. INCIDENT MAY ALSO PROVIDE MINING COMPANIES WITH JUSTIFICATION FOR CLOSING SEVERAL OF ISLAND'S OLDER AND LESS PROFITABLE MINES ON GROUNDS OF SAFETY.

6. IF ASHIBETSU DISASTER LEADS TO CLOSURE OF OTHER HOKKAIDO MINES IN NEAR FUTURE, ISLAND'S COAL PRODUCTION COULD DECLINE SIGNIFICANTLY. LAST YEAR'S PRODUCTION WAS 11.4 MILLION TONS--ABOUT 60 PERCENT OF JAPAN'S TOTAL OUTPUT.
FARRAR

UNCLASSIFIED

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: COAL MINING, OCCUPATIONAL ACCIDENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 16-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977SAPPOR00050
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770172-1124
Format: TEL
From: SAPPORO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770552/aaaabtdu.tel
Line Count: 77
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0b54be92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2503920
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HOKKAIDO COAL MINE DISASTER
TAGS: ENRG, ECON, EMIN, JA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0b54be92-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009